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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role of the affective realm in the reading process. Its purposes are to provide some basic information about self-concept and to emphasize the prominent position which self-concept should occupy in teaching. The contents include a discussion of what self-concept is, of how self-concept is developed, and of the relationship between self-concept and reading; and a brief description of research studies which found a significant relationship between self-concept and reading. (WR)

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# "SELF-CONCEPT AND READING"

by

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In recent years, American education has become increasingly preoccupied with the attainment of skills by its students. Such terms as "accountability" and "behavioral objectives" have now become an intergral part of virtually every school district's curricular jargon. While almost all educators would applaud any venture which provides students with vital cognitive skills, nevertheless, a note of caution regarding this increased emphasis upon skill attainment by our students does seem warranted.

In my visits to various school districts, I have witnessed a rather alarming trend. In the majority of instances, this preoccupation with achievement has been at the expense of the affective domain. And nowhere is this undesirable transition of priorities more prevalent than in the area of reading. All too often, I see teachers of reading busily engaged in such acts as: passing out sequenced worksheets, issuing reading reinforcement drill activities, and correcting Dr. So-And-So's new programmed reading exercises, which if done correctly, promise to transform every remedial and/or reluctant reader instantly (or at least within the next week) into a proficient and prolific reader.

The aforementioned activities are generally conducted without consideration of the student. An attempt is not made either to assess how the student feels about doing these activities or to ascertain how the student feels while doing them. Rather, what is important to the teacher is one thing-the percentage which the student answered correctly on these exercises.

While it might seem that I am condemning teachers who strive to

produce competent readers, such is not the case. On the contrary, I heartily applaud and commend their fine efforts. What I am castigating, however, is those teachers of reading who are so infatuated with their students' acquisition of skills that in the process, they are virtually unaware of the attitudes, feelings, and emotions of these students.

If one endorses the premise that a primary goal of a teacher is to produce a competent reader and one who becomes a lifetime reader, then now is the time to reflect upon the following question: Of what value is it to provide students with the skill to read, if in the process, we destroy their will to read? After reflection upon this question, I hope your answer will be, as mine, NONE!

It is my desire then today to discuss with you the role of the affective realm in the reading process. Since time constraints prohibit me from discussing the multiplicity of diverse ingredients which comprise the affective domain, my presentation will concern itself with only one of its segments. This is the area of "self-concept," which in my judgment is its most crucial constituent. This presentation, therefore, will seek to answer three questions: (1) What is self-concept?; (2) How is self-concept developed?; and, (3) What is the relationship between self-concept and reading?

By answering these three questions, it is my intentions to accomplish one of two purposes. For those of you who are already cognizant of self-concept and its importance in the educational process, I wish to reinforce and reaffirm your convictions. For those of you who are skeptical

about self-concept and/or who don't know a great deal about it, my purpose is two-fold: (1) to provide you with some basic information about self-concept; and, (2) to convince you of the prominent position its development should occupy in your teaching goals.

Let us now turn to the three questions.

## Question 1: What Is Self-Concept?

Regarding one's attempt to define self-concept, a parallel can be drawn between in and beauty. Just as beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, definitions of self-concept varying according to the individual who is attempting to define it.

What is self-concept? Self-concept is certainly not a new term. In fact, the Hindu scriptures in the first century B.C. said:

> "Oh, let the self exalt itself,
> Not sink itself below;
> Self is the only friend of self,
> And self self's only foe.
>
> For self, when it subdues itself
> Befriends itself. And so
> When it eludes self-conquest, is
> Its own and only foe.
>
> So calm, so self-subdued, the self
> Has an unshaken base
> Through pain and pleasure, cold and heat
> Through honor and disgrace." [1]

Quandt[2] has said self-concept "refers to all the perceptions that an individual has of himself: especially emphasized are the individual's perceptions of his value and his ability."

In a United States Office of Education Cooperative Research Project,

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[1]Wallace, D. La Benne and Bert I. Greene, Educational Implications of Self-Concept Theory, Pacific Palisades, California: Goodyear Publishing Company, Inc., 1969, p. 1.

[2]Ivan Quandt, Self-Concept And Reading, Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, p. 5.

by Brookover, Erickson and Joiner[3], self concept was defined as the "evaluation one makes of oneself in respect to the ability to achieve in academic tasks in general as compared with others." They further add that self-concept "refers to behavior in which one indicates to himself (publicly or privately) his ability to achieve in academic tasks as compared with others engaged in the same tasks."

La Benne and Greene[4] have stated that self-concept is "the person's total appraisal of his appearance, background and origins, abilities and resources, attitudes and feelings which culminate as a directing force in behavior."

Having defined self-concept, we can now seek to answer question two.

Question 2: How Is Self-Concept Developed?

As previously cited definitions indicate, disparity does exist among experts' definitions of self-concept. With regard to our second question (How is self-concept developed?), experts tend to be in near accord concerning the key components involved in the development of self-concept or self-image. They are: an individual's view of himself as compared to others (self-perception); an individual's view of how others see him (self-other perception); and, the way in which one wishes he could be seen (self-ideal). Most experts also believe that an individual's self-concept is largely based upon his contacts with those persons who are important to him (significant others).[5] For children, significant

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[3]Wilbur B. Brookover, Edsel L. Erickson and Lee Joiner, Self-Concept of Ability And School Achievement, III, Report of the U.S. Office of Education Cooperative Research Project, No. 2831, College of Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1967, p. 40.

[4]La Benne and Greene, p. 10.

[5]Quandt, p.5.

others are usually parents and teachers, and for adults, they generally are spouses and very close friends.

Although most experts hold quite similar views regarding the aforementioned key components in the self-concept development process, nevertheless, there are some subtle differences among the experts concerning self-concept development. The following referents should be illustrative of these subtle differentiations.

Kelly[6] views self-concept development as:

> The self 'looks out' upon the surrounding scene largely in terms of its own enhancement or defense. It tends to extend in the direction of that which seems likely to endanger it. This is largely true throughout life and entirely true in the early stages when the self is being established. . . . The more facilitating the environment, the greater need for protection. . . protection (defenses) becomes isilation. The self becomes a prisoner in its own fort. We have all seen persons off whom words or ideas seem to bounce. They have become inaccessible.

La Benne and Greene[7] maintain "the self-concept is built or achieved through accumulated social contacts and experiences with other people." They further add that "people learn their identity, who and what they are, from the kinds of experiences the growing-up process provides."

Jersild[8] also believes that self-awareness does not materialize in an "all-or-none fashion." Rather, he adheres to the belief that the self develops gradually, as a child perceives different aspects of

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[6]E. C. Kelley, "The Fully Functioning Self," in A. W. Combs (ed.), Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming (Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1962), p. 14-15.

[7]La Benne and Greene, p. 13.

[8]A. T. Jersild, Child Psychology, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1960, p. 40.

what he eventually call himself, with varying degrees of clarity at different times.

Gillham[9] has involved the teacher in the development of self process. She contends that the development of self-concept is a learned behavior, and as such, it can be modified or improved. Gillham also asserts that, if the child is to develop a positive self-concept and become successful in school, then parents and teachers must express confidence in the child's abilities.

Hamacheck[10] contends that at a very early age each individual begins to develop an image, or concept of himself, as a unique person different from every other person. He also maintains that an exploration of self beings in the nursery with a "body image" and a differentiation of self.

My own view of self-concept is that it does indeed begin developing at a very early age. I also feel that an individual's view of himself as compared with others, an individual's view of how ithers see him, and the way in which one wishes to be seen, are all important in the development of self-concept. While I also believe in the significant other concept, I believe the role of the teacher as a significant other has been greatly underemphasized. It is my belief that for virtually all children, and especially those children who view the teacher as a parent figure, the teacher is a very strong and powerful force in the formation of their self-concept.

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[9]Isabel Gillham, "Self-Concept in Reading," The Reading Teacher, XXI (1967), pp. 270-273.

[10]Don E. Hamacheck, The Self in Growth, Teaching and Learning, Engelwood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965, p. 37.

Having discussed the viewpoints regarding how self-concept is developed, the third question can now be fully answered.

### Question 3: What Is the Relationship between Self-concept And Reading?

Since everyone at this session has an interest in, and commitment to, the teaching of reading, the third question (What is the relationship between self-concept and reading?) is probably the most important. Rather than prolong your anxiety, let me answer the question immediately. There is a positive relationship between self-concept and reading achievement. The following research investigations support the previous statement.

In 1959, Lumpkin[11] studied twenty-four underachievers and twenty-four overachievers in reading at the fifth grade level. It was found that the overachievers in reading had a significantly more positive self-concept than the underachievers.

Bodwin also conducted a research investigation in 1959. Third through sixth graders served as subjects, and results indicated a significant positive relationship existed between immature self-concept and reading ability.

In a 1961 study, Hamachek[13] obtained measures of growth and self-images for 100 children. Analysis of data revealed high intellectual and achievement self-images are related to reading age, mental age, and educational age (which is an average of reading, spelling, language, arithmetic comprehension and arithmetic reasoning ages).

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[11] D. D. Lumpkin, Relationship of Self-Concept to Achievement in Reading, Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1959.

[12] R. F. Bodwin, "The Relationship between Immature Self-Concept And Certain Educational Disabilities," Dissertation Abstracts, 1959, pp. 1645-1646.

[13] Don E. Hamachek, A Study of the Relatioship between Certain Measures of Growth And the Self Images of Elementary School Children, Ph. D. Disseration, University of Michigan, 1960

A 1962 investigation by Wattenberg and Clifford[14] sought to determine "wheter there existed evidence as to the link between self-concept and achievement in beginning reading." Two of their conclusions were: (1) "Measures of children's self-concept upon entering kindergarten seem to be predictive of their later accomplishments in beginning reading"; and, (2) "It would appear worthwhile to include in any measure of self-concept at the kindergarten level some indication of preoccupation with self or with competence. There was evidence that defensiveness in these respects is negatively related to success in reading."

In 1973 and 1974 Dr. Henry D. Olsen and I conducted two research investigations which have particular relevance for this presentation, Our 1973 investigation[15] utilized 188 black and white stuedents in an effort to ascertain the relationship between self-concept and reading proficiency. These students were randomly selected from an adult basic education program. The students were administered the Nelson Denny Reading Test, and on the basis of their scores, they were classified as reading "above actual grade placement" or "below actual grade placement".

Each student was also given the Michigan State Self-Concept of Academic Ability Scale (which hereafter will be referred to as the "MSCOAA"). The MSCOAA is an eight item Cuttman Scale with total scores of 8.000-15.999 indicating that the student perceives himself as "POOR", a toal score of 16.000-23.999 denoting an impression of being "BELOW AVERAGE", a total score of 24.000-31.999 symbolizing a perception of "AVERAGE", 32.000-39.000 indicates that the student feels himself to be "ABOVE AVERAGE", and a total

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[14]William Wattenberg and Clare Clifford, "Relationship of the Self-Concept to Beginning Achievement in Reading", ERIC ED002 859, 1962, p.58.

[15]Henry D. Olsen and John N. Mangieri, "Self-Concept-of-Academic-Ability And Reading Proficiency", 1973 (submitted for publication).

score of 40.000 view himself as being of "SUPERIOR" ability.

Results of the study indicated that students in this investigation who were classified as reading above actual grade placement were found to have a significantly more favorable mean self-concept-of-academic ability score than did students reading below grade placement. Thus, on a basis of these results, it was concluded there is a significant relationship between self-concept and reading achievement.

In our 1974 study[16] 253 college students were randomly chosen as subjects. As in the 1973 investigation, the Nelson-Denny Reading Test and the Michigan State Self-Concept-of-Academic ability Scale were administered to every student. The same research design, as was used in the prior study, was utilized in this investigation.

Analysis of data revealed that college students who were classified as reading above actual grade placement were found to have a significantly more favorable mean self-concept-of-academic ability score than did college students reading below actual grade placement. Thus, as was also shown in the previous investigation, there is a significant relationship between self-concept and reading achievement.

In my few remaining minutes, I could continue to cite research investigations which have also found significant relationships between self-concept and achievement, however, other than for reinforcement purposes, little would be served by doing this.

Hopefully, you now have an understanding of what self-concept is and how it is developed. You also have been presented evidentce regarding its

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[16]John N. Mangieri and Henry D. OLsen, "Self-Concept And Reading Achievement," 1974, (submitted for publication).

relationship to reading achievement. Dr. Henry D. Olsen, our next speaker, will dwell upon its implications for teachers as well as classroom procedures which foster positive self-concepts in children and adolescents.

When you go back to the classroom on Monday, you can dismiss the ideas presented by Dr. Olsen and I as inappropriate or too time consuming, and thus virtually ignore self-concept development with your students. Or on Monday, in your classroom, in your role of a significant other, you could begin to utilize the instructional procedures which Dr. Olsen will suggest. As La Benne and Greene [17] have said this regarding the role of self-concept development in the classroom:

> . . . teachers have no right to constantly ignore policies, curricular practices, teaching methodology, and classroom experiences that are potentially dangerous to their students. Teachers cannot turn aside from these matters and feel that their only task is to teach a subject and maintain control of the classroom. Society's most precious possession has been intrusted to teachers, and they are obligated not to betray that trust and confidence.

The choice is yours, - Thank you.

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[17] La Benne and Greene, Preface IV.

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